I:Heckewelder M-5 (ca. 1800)1819
NM7 Delaware NM7

CHAPTER VII.

GOVERNMENT.

622 623 624 ALTHOUGH the Indians have no code of laws for their government, their chiefs find little or no difficulty in governing them. They are supported by able experienced counsellors; men who study the welfare of the nation, and are equally interested with themselves in its prosperity. On them the people rely entirely, believing that what they do, or determine upon, must be right and for the public good.

623 Proud of seeing such able men conduct the affairs of their nation, the Indians are little troubled about what they are doing, knowing that the result of their deliberations will be made public in due time, and sure that it will receive their approbation. This result is made known to them by the chief through the orator, for which purpose they are called together and assemble at the council house; and if it be found necessary, to require a contribution of *wampum*, for carrying the decision of the chiefs into effect, it is cheerfully complied with by the whole assembly.

622 217 The chiefs are very careful in preserving for their own information, and that of future generations, all important deliberations and treaties made at any time between them and other nations. Thus, between the years 1770 and 1780, they could relate very minutely, what had passed between William Penn and their forefathers, at their first meeting and afterwards, and also the transactions which took place with the governors who succeeded him. For the purpose of refreshing their own memories, and of instructing one or more of their most capable and promi-

1:Heckewelder M-5 (ca. 1800)1819
NM7 Delaware NM7

sing young men in these matters, they assemble once or twice a year. On these occasions they always meet at a chosen spot in the woods, at a small distance from the town, where a fire is kindled, and at the proper time provisions are brought out to them: there, on a large piece of bark or on a blanket, all the documents are laid out in such order, that they can at once distinguish each particular speech, the same as we know the principal contents of an instrument of writing by the endorsement on it. If any paper or parchment writings are connected with the belts, or strings of wampum, they apply to some trusty white man (if such can be had,) to read the contents to them. Their speaker then, who is always chosen from among those who are endowed with superior talents, and has already been trained up to the business, rises, and in an audible voice delivers, with the gravity that the subject requires, the contents, sentence after sentence, until he has finished the whole on one subject. On the manner in which the belts or strings of wampum are handled by the speaker, much depends; the *turning** of the belt which takes place when he has finished one half of his speech, is a material point, though this is not common in *all* speeches with belts; but when it is the case, and is done properly, it may be as well known by it how far the speaker has advanced in his speech, as with us on taking a glance at the pages of a book or pamphlet while reading; and a good speaker will be able to point out the exact place on a belt which is to answer

* When, between the years 1760 and 1768, the noted war-chief Pontiac had concerted a plan of surprising and cutting off the garrison and town of Detroit, while in the act of delivering an impressive peace oration, to the then commandant Major Gladwyn, the *turning of the belt* was to have been the signal of the attack by his forces, who all had their guns, which previously had been cut off to large pistol length, hidden under their blankets. So I have been informed by some of the most respectable inhabitants of Detroit, and by the Indians themselves.

l:Heckewelder M-5 (ca. 1800)1819
NM7 Delaware NM7

to each particular sentence, the same as we can point out a passage in a book. Belts and strings, when done with by the speaker, are again handed to the chief, who puts them up carefully in the speech bag or pouch.

A message of importance is generally sent on to the place of its destination, by an inferior chief, by a counsellor, or by the speaker, especially when an immediate answer is expected. In other cases, where for instance only an answer to a speech is to be sent, two capable young men are selected for the purpose, the one to deliver the message or answer, and the other to pay attention while his companion is delivering it, that no part be forgotten or omitted. If the message be of a private nature, they are charged to draw or take it *under ground*, that is, not to make it known to any person whatsoever, except to him to whom it is directed. If they are told to enter *into the earth* with the message or speech, and rise again at the place where they are to deliver it, it is to desire them to be careful not to be seen by the way by any person, and for that purpose to avoid all paths, and travel through the woods.

No chief pays any attention to *reports*, though they may carry with them the marks of truth. Until he is *officially* and in due form apprised of the matter, he will, if questioned on the subject, reply that he had *not heard it*. It will, until then, be considered by him as the *song of a bird which had flown by*; but as soon as he is officially informed, through a string of wampum from some distant chief or leading man of the nation, whose situation entitles him to receive credit, he then will say: "I *have* heard it;" and acts accordingly.

The Indians generally, but their chiefs more particularly, have many figurative expressions in use, to understand which requires instruction. When a nation, by message or otherwise, speaks to another nation in this way, it is well understood; but when they speak to white people after this manner, who have not been accustomed to such language, explanations are necessary.

3:Zeisberger M-5 (1767-1780)1910
NM7 Delaware NM7

ingratiate himself with the people and stand by his counsellors. Hence, it is that the chiefs are generally friendly, gracious, hospitable, communicative, affable and their house is open to every Indian. Even strangers who come on business put up in the chief's house and are accommodated with the best it affords. The ambassadors of other nations generally lodge with the chief and they are well cared for. If their number is too great, and it has happened in connection with weighty affairs concerning several nations that ten or twenty men of other nations have arrived at the principal chief's house, they are put into a separate house and provided with every thing at the public expense, the counsellors taking care that they are entertained most hospitably in order that the nation may be in good repute amongst other nations.

In externals a chief has no advantages above others. He must provide for his own maintenance, for no one is under any obligation to supply his wants. His wife, whose duty it is to provide sufficient corn for the year, is usually assisted by other women in her plantations, for much corn is required in such a house. If the chief is young and able to hunt he will, his official duties permitting, occasionally join the chase. He will even secure his own firewood as far as possible. In case he is old his friends, of whom there are usually many, and other Indians will furnish him with game, especially if he be popular.

The council house is either the house of the chief, which is commonly large and roomy, or a building erected for that purpose. Here public councils are held, that is, such where messages which have arrived from whites or other Indians are published. Every one may listen and the messages are also discussed. In case there is something of particular importance to consider, only the chief and the counsellors assemble and determine upon the matter. The old chief Netawatwes[259] used to lay all affairs of state before his council for consideration. When they gave him their opinion, he either approved of it or indicated what was missing or not correct in the speech, upon which they would make the necessary amendments. Thus he kept them active and was held in great esteem.

The chief has the council bag in his possession, as also the

3:Zeisberger M-5 (1767-1780)1910 -
NM7 Delaware NM7

treaties that have been made with the governors of the provinces and other documents, although they are not able to read. These constitute the archives, where all messages and reports are kept. With each message or speech there are one or more strings or belts of wampum. These, with the message or speech after the latter have been properly considered and answered, are deposited in the archives.[200] In connection with such a message there may be a string or belt to each point, for as soon as the deliverer of a message has finished with a point he gives over a string or belt to the chief, gets out another and continues to speak until his message has been fully delivered when he announces that he has done. If the strings and belts are handed about from one to another in the council this is an indication that the message is being favorably received. It may happen, however, that the chief does not take the belt into his hands but pushes it to one side with a stick, in which case no one will touch it. The messenger who has brought it must in this case take it back. This signifies that his message does not find approbation and it is accounted a disgrace. Such a rejected belt may be a war belt summoning the people to war, or it may be a belt admonishing them to maintain peace, or something else that is not agreeable may be required.

The wampum which Europeans make and barter to the Indians is made of sea-mussel shells. One variety is quite white, the other dark violet, a quarter of an inch in length, an eighth of an inch in thickness and round. A hole is bored lengthwise through each shell, large enough to admit a heavy cord. They are strung like beads. Wampum constitutes the money of the Indians. Two hundred shells cost a buck hide, or a Spanish dollar.[201] Before the white people came they had no such wampum for want of proper instruments to make it.[202] The white are a little less in value than the dark.

Strings are made of the beads that have been strung as described. Two, four or six placed side by side and properly fastened form a string. A string is usually half a yard long, sometimes longer. Upon delivery of a string a long speech may be made and much said upon the subject under consideration.

3:Zeisberger M-5 (1767-1780)1910
NM7 Delaware NM7

Of writing they know nothing, except the painting of hieroglyphics, already referred to, which they know very well how to interpret. These drawings in red by the warriors may be legible for fifty years. After a hero has died, his deeds may, therefore, be kept in mind for many years by these markings. A letter, especially, if it is sealed, is considered a very important thing. If any treaties, contracts or deeds are required to be delivered to the Europeans, signed by their chiefs, captains or counsellors, they make their mark and get others to subscribe their names. The mark may be a hook, or the foot of a turkey or a turtle or represent something else. They are very generally ashamed of their Indian names and prefer the names given them by the whites. Some have learned to write the initial letters of their new names.

In reckoning time they do not count the days but the nights. An Indian says, "I have travelled so many nights." Only if the entire journey has been accomplished in one day, will he speak of a day's journey. Most of them determine a number of years by so many winters, springs, summers or autumns. They say, "In spring when we boil sugar," that is March, or "when we plant," that is May, so and so will be of such an age. Few know their age when they get to be over thirty. Some reckon from the time of a hard frost or a deep fall of snow in such a year, from an Indian war, or from the founding of Pittsburg or Philadelphia, when they were so or so old. They divide the year into winter, spring, summer, autumn, and these periods are divided according to the moons, though, it must be said, that their reckoning is not very accurate. They cannot agree just when to begin the new year. Most of them begin the year with the spring, that is with March, which they call Chwoame Gischuch, that is the Shad month, because at this season this fish goes up the rivers and creeks in great numbers. True, these fish are not found here, but the name was brought from the Susquehanna region. April they call Hackihewi Gischuch, that is Planting month, though they rarely begin to plant before May or the end of April. May has a name signifying the month in which the hoe is used for Indian corn, though this is usually not.